

Foreword

by Dan Glickman, Secretary of Agriculture

As we approach a new century, we can't talk about 1999 without also looking at the evolution of the Department of Agriculture throughout the 20th century.

One hundred years ago, we lived up to our nickname, "The People's Department," through our service to the half of the population that lived and worked on farms. Today, with less than 2 percent of the people working the land, our mission has evolved to include not only production agriculture, but a host of other programs and functions that make USDA today as much "The People's Department" as we've ever been—even more so.

From food safety to conservation, to managing our forests, to administering the Nation's feeding programs, to research on everything from nutrition to pollution, to looking out for the good of rural America, to, of course, production agriculture, the work we do touches the lives of every American.

Assisting Farmers and Ranchers

At the turn of the century farming usually meant raising crops, packing them on the back of the wagon, and making the long trek on dirt roads into town to sell. We're a long way away from the days when we were mostly an agrarian economy. With drastic changes in the way we grow and market our food, agriculture has been transformed to the point where only 1 in 50 Americans does the work that feeds all of us and much of the world. But, with that transformation have come new pressures, some of which have devastated farmers in recent years.

Much of the misfortune visited upon farmers in the last 2 years came through no fault of their own. So we've had to find ways to help this segment of our population who toil in relative anonymity to give us the world's safest, most abundant, and most affordable food supply.

In 1999, American farmers and ranchers suffered through a second straight year of economic hardship. Due to the fourth consecutive year of record worldwide production and continuing weak demand in Asian and other markets, commodity prices remained stubbornly low—in some cases, their lowest in 30 years. And, another year of bad weather led to devastating crop and income loss.

Once again, the Department of Agriculture, working with Congress and President Clinton, did everything possible to help our farmers get through this trying period. All told, USDA made a combined \$18 billion in direct payments and Federal crop insurance benefits in 1999. We provided over \$3.9 billion in credit, more than a three-quarters jump from 1998 and the most in the last 15 years. We increased emergency lending to its highest level since 1985.

Growers around the East Coast and the mid-Atlantic faced the driest growing season in recorded history in 1999. I declared 12 States and parts of 33 others agricultural disaster areas, qualifying them for low-interest loans and other forms of assistance.

Exports remain one of the keys to increasing farm sales and income, so we were very aggressive about increasing access to global markets. We completed an important agreement that will facilitate trade with Canada. Sanctions were eased on sales of food and medicine to Iran, Libya, and Sudan. And USDA shipped about 8 million metric tons of food to needy people around the globe, our highest total in at least a quarter century.

In April, we negotiated a wide-ranging agricultural trade agreement with China, which now promises to take effect as China prepares to join the World Trade Organization. The terms will allow our farmers to sell wheat, citrus, meat, and poultry to China. Ultimately, this deal will mean an estimated \$900 million in additional farm exports every year.

Food Safety

From the early 1900s, when the sordid conditions in America's meatpacking plants were exposed to the Nation, to today's massive Federal effort led by USDA, ensuring the safety of America's food supply has been of paramount importance to the American people.

In 1999 we continued to upgrade our food safety inspection systems to ensure that the American food supply remains the world's safest. In January, we began the second phase of our new science-based meat and poultry inspection system—Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP). And HACCP Phase II is working. We have found that the prevalence of

Salmonella has decreased by as much as 50 percent in small plants. And the decline we saw in *Salmonella* in large plants in 1998 continued this year.

America the Beautiful

In the early part of this century Theodore Roosevelt dedicated this Nation to the preservation of our natural resources. Since TR's day our land, air, and water have not always fared too well, especially at the hands of industrialization. But, on the cusp of the new millennium, this Nation finds itself again embracing Roosevelt's vision, working to preserve our natural resources.

President Clinton made clear our commitment to the Nation's forests by taking the first steps toward protecting 40 million acres of untouched forest land from unneeded intrusion by road builders. We helped our farmers and ranchers adopt sustainable management practices on over 16 million acres of land, and with the Interior Department, we led an interagency effort to develop a comprehensive strategy under the Clean Water Action Plan. In December, we held the Nation's first-ever private lands conservation summit to craft conservation strategies for the new millennium.

Nutritional Safety Net

Back at the turn of the century, people didn't know much about the food they ate or the effects of malnutrition on their minds and bodies. Today, thanks to nutrition research, it's a totally different story. But, even as we live in the most abundant, prosperous Nation on earth, many Americans struggle to feed their families while millions of others have unhealthy diets.

This year we continued to step up our anti-hunger efforts by making it easier for qualifying working families to obtain food stamps. And this year we found that more than one-third of all people eligible for food stamps have not been taking advantage of this program. That's why this past summer President Clinton launched a Food Stamp Outreach Campaign to let eligible people know that help is there for those who need it, and USDA continues to get the word out.

We held a Community Food Security Summit designed to increase partnerships that will help develop grass roots solutions to hunger, and we've increased our

gleaning and food recovery efforts.

Nutrition research and education have become an integral responsibility of this department. This year we've worked hard at getting the most current information into the hands of consumers—from the new Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children to strategies for combating obesity by encouraging a healthful diet and regular physical activity.

Dawn of a New Day

As the 1800s came to a close, a dedicated scientist used his intellect to revolutionize agriculture—from inventing crop rotation to finding new uses for plants. This year, in his honor and to promote the values and vision that he stood for, we renamed the headquarters complex at the world's largest agriculture research facility in Beltsville, MD—The George Washington Carver Center.

As an African American who was born during the Civil War and who died during World War II, Dr. Carver witnessed much adversity in his life, but the fiercest obstacle he faced was racism. Like American society as a whole, USDA has struggled over the years to reconcile more than a century of racial differences.

But, in 1999 we began to turn the corner. We've settled complaints and lawsuits on past discrimination and have worked hard to overhaul our institutional culture. We've insisted that all people be treated with fairness, dignity, and respect regardless of their skin color, their station in life, their physical challenges, or where their ancestors are from.

As we embark on a new year, a new century, and a new millennium, the people of USDA are proud that the work of the last year has set a course that not only meets our goals and fulfills our mission, but in a way that continues to live up to the name "The People's Department."